Temporal aspects of language change: what can we learn from the CEEC?

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My paper discusses the time course of a number of morphosyntactic changes in Renaissance English. It is surprisingly seldom that linguistic changes have been attributed a more accurate timing than a ‘full’ period, such as Late Middle English or Early Modern English. My study will give a more precise timing to the diffusion of the changes under scrutiny among the population of England. Both the macro- and micro-level will be taken into account and changes presented as S-curves.

In addition to timing, the following questions will be raised on the macro-level. How should we define the beginning and end of a change? At what rate do changes proceed? What are the factors that play a role in the progression of a change?

On the micro-level, individual speakers are in focus. How do individuals behave in relation to ongoing changes? Do they change their language during their lifetimes? If they do, where shall we look for reasons?

The data are retrieved from the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC), compiled at the University of Helsinki by the project ‘Sociolinguistics and Language History’. The CEEC contains around 6000 letters from 1417-1681, forming a corpus of 2.7 million words especially designed for studies in historical sociolinguistics.

The following changes will be dealt with: replacement of subject YE by YOU, third person singular suffix -TH versus -S, loss of multiple negation, object of gerund constructions, possessives MINE and THINE versus MY and THY, and introduction of possessive ITS.

References
